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AID/W FOR DCHA

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TAGS: PGOV EAID PHUM KDEM MO
SUBJECT: MORROCO: LOWER HOUSE LEADER SEEKS GREATER
ENGAGEMENT WITH U.S. CONGRESS

REF: CASABLANCA 0074

Classified By: Charge Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During an April 28 meeting with Charge, lower house of Parliament President Mustapha Mansouri made a strong appeal for increased contact between Moroccan Parliamentarians and Members of Congress to facilitate better understanding of Morocco's claims to Western Sahara. Mansouri predicted that local/communal elections in June, which indirectly determine the makeup of the upper house of Parliament, will not significantly change Morocco's political landscape. Victorious candidates from Mansouri's National Rally of Independents party (RNI) will likely form local alliances with those of the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) after the elections, but they generally will not run joint tickets. Mansouri added that the Government will probably re-table controversial legislation to reform the traffic code that had recently been withdrawn from the Chamber of Councilors, agenda because of labor union strikes. End Summary.

Appeal for Increased Contact with Congress

¶2. (SBU) On April 28, Charge, PolCouns and D/PolCouns called on Moroccan Chamber of Deputies President Mustapha Mansouri, who was joined by Seventh Vice President (PAM) Hamid Narjissee. Mansouri made a strong appeal for increased contact between Moroccan Parliamentarians and Members of Congress to explain the Moroccan position on the Western Sahara. Mansouri encouraged visits by Senators and Representatives to Rabat and asked Charge to promote parliamentary visits to Washington, D.C. He said that the goal of these exchanges would be to establish "durable relationships," which could then be used to better explain Morocco's territorial claims to Western Sahara. He had intended to visit Washington in April but understood there was a crowded calendar this year. He would not be able to travel to the U.S. in the near future due to the June 12 local communal elections. After that, he would be focused on the process of indirect elections, whereby the successful communal councilors would elevate some of their peers to regional councils and the upper house of Parliament.

¶3. (SBU) On Western Sahara, Mansouri noted no Arab states had recognized the Polisario's shadow Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). He also asserted that no one questions the claims of other North African countries like Algeria, Libya and Egypt to large swaths of the Sahara, despite having similar indigenous inhabitants living in them; "why should Moroccan claims be treated any differently?" He excoriated Algeria for its recalcitrance on the Western Sahara question and inability to break out of "1960s paradigms." He contrasted the youth, dynamism, and

reform-oriented mentality of Moroccan Ministers to the aged, uncreative and reactionary attitudes of Algerian equivalents, "who stay mired in rhetoric about the 'war of liberation' and the National Liberation Front."

Communal Elections and Party Alliances

¶4. (SBU) Mansouri said that his Rally of National Independents (RNI) party generally would not form a local alliances or joint tickets with the Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) to contest the June 12th local/communal elections, but afterwards they could form coalitions in these councils. While they have a joint parliamentary bloc, the two parties remain independent. He said that RNI candidates would be run on their own party list without any coordination with PAM, to maximize the potential electoral wins at the communal level. With some 32 parties in Morocco's political system, and multimember districts, running separately had numerical advantages. All parties must then seek coalition with others at all levels of government, local to national, to form ruling majorities, Mansouri explained. He said that PAM and RNI, being ideologically similar, were natural allies. Narjissee, an uncle of PAM leader-in-fact Fouad Ali el Himma, nodded his assent.

¶5. (SBU) Mansouri lauded the prospect of more women entering politics as a result of the recent agreement reached among political parties to reserve 12 percent of communal seats for women in the coming election. He also praised U.S.-provided training, through the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI), for pre-election

and post-election training of Moroccan women candidates/politicians in electioneering and professional development.

¶6. (SBU) Mansouri predicted that the communal elections would not alter much the political landscape of the country. While allowing that the introduction of more women politicians would be a new dynamic, Mansouri considered the party balance at the communal level and, by extension, national level to be stable and unlikely to shift much.
(Note: A large portion of members of the upper house of Parliament are chosen indirectly, though a series of internal elections, from among councilors elected first at the communal level, somewhat like the way Senators were elected in the early United States. End Note.)

Readout on Public Rejection of the Traffic Code Reform

¶7. (SBU) When asked about the impact of the withdrawal from consideration of the proposed traffic code, resulting from strikes that paralyzed commerce in Morocco several weeks ago (reftel), Mansouri, himself a former Minister of Transport, was optimistic. Mansouri said that the law was rejected by a coalition of labor unions that criticized the law for its increase in fines and jail terms for traffic violations. Striking unions characterized the penalty increases as exorbitant and an opportunity for increased graft among Morocco's police, known for their bribe-taking. Mansouri said that while some of the criticisms were valid, the legislation had been designed to lower traffic fatalities, a significant problem in Morocco. (Note: Over 4,000 people died in 2008 from traffic-related accidents. End Note.) The legislation had many good aspects including mandatory rest periods for truck drivers. Mansouri said that the Government had done a poor job of educating and lobbying labor unions before taking the matter to a vote in the upper house. Mansouri said that the legislation will likely be altered, i.e., with lower traffic fines and other modifications, and re-tabled in Parliament at an unspecified future date.
(Note: On May 4, Minister of Energy, Mines, Water and Environment Amina Benkhadra told Charge that the Government realized that it needed to do a better job of explaining the

advantages of the new traffic code and countering the outright lies that opponents are spreading. End Note.)

¶18. (U) Finally, Mansouri thanked the United States for the assistance that we have provided through USAID's Parliamentary Strengthening Project implemented by the State University of New York (SUNY) and the two party institutes, IRI and NDI. He suggested that we discuss with Narjisso ways to build upon that assistance.

¶19. (C) Comment: Mansouri's appeal for greater contact between Moroccan Parliamentarians and Members of Congress was a real priority focused more on Western Sahara than promoting parliamentary reform. Like most politicians, Mansouri, is focusing his energies on internal party matters and the upcoming communal elections. End Comment.

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Jackson